United Nations A/57/864

General Assembly

Distr.: General
12 September 2003

Original: English

Fifty-seventh session
Agenda item 10
Report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization

Note by the President of the General Assembly

Following the adoption of General Assembly resolution 57/337 of 3 July 2003 on prevention of armed conflict, I organized an open meeting to facilitate an interactive dialogue on the role of civil society in the prevention of armed conflict. The meeting was held on 4 September 2003.

I have the honour to transmit a report on that meeting for the information of Member States (see annex).

03-49964 (E) 120903

Annex

Report of the President of the fifty-seventh session of the General Assembly, Mr. Jan Kavan, on the results of the open meeting on the role of civil society in the prevention of armed conflict

4 September 2003, Trusteeship Council Chamber

I. Introduction

1. In adopting resolution 57/337 of 3 July 2003 on prevention of armed conflict, the General Assembly recognized, in paragraph 39 of the annex to that resolution, the important supporting role of civil society in the prevention of armed conflict and invited civil society to continue to support efforts for the prevention of armed conflict and to pursue practices that foster a climate of peace, help prevent or mitigate crisis situations and contribute to reconciliation. The intention of the President of the fifty-seventh session of the General Assembly in organizing this open meeting was to:

(a) Capitalize and build on the momentum from the success of the General Assembly's resolution on the prevention of armed conflict, using this as an opportunity to create follow-up activities and initiatives;

(b) Explore interactively how best to link the work of civil society in conflict prevention with the work of Governments and the United Nations;

(c) Offer substantive content for the Missions to consider the core issues and respond to the concerns, questions and ideas of Member States;

(d) Update the Member States about the programme of work of the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict towards research, capacity-building and regional consultations leading to an international conference in 2005 devoted to the role of civil society in conflict prevention.

Participants

Chair: H. E. Mr. Jan Kavan	President of the fifty-seventh session of the General Assembly
Mr. Jan Egeland	Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs
Mr. Danilo Türk	Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs
Mr. Paul van Tongeren	Executive Director, European Centre for Conflict Prevention
Dr. Andrés Serbin	Coordinador Regional de Investigaciones Económicas y Sociales in Argentina
Mrs. Raya Kadyrova	Foundations for Tolerance International in Kyrgyzstan
Mr. Emmanuel Bombande	West African Network for Peace-building in Ghana
Dr. Mary B. Anderson	President of the Collaborative for Development Action
UN-NGO Conflict Prevention Working Group	
88 Member States	

II. Presentations

Actors in prevention

2. The complex nature of contemporary violent conflict requires the effective and coordinated interaction of Governments, intergovernmental organizations and civil society organizations. Mr. Egeland noted that he knew of "no successful peace processes that have not included all three". Regarding civil society organizations specifically, Mr. Türk recalled that Article 71 of the Charter recognizes the importance of civil society to the work of the United Nations. It is therefore necessary for Member States, the United Nations, and civil society organizations to consider the challenges of the interaction of such organizations with Member States and the United Nations.

3. The Charter of the United Nations, the report of the Secretary-General on the prevention of armed conflict (A/55/985-S/2001/574), various Security Council resolutions and General Assembly resolution 57/337 affirm the importance of prevention and that the primary responsibility for prevention lies with Member States. However, alliances across governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental sectors from the beginning of the conflict are not only important, but also essential in finding sustainable solutions to conflicts before they escalate into violence. It is clear that the United Nations system cannot do everything; it needs broad-based partnerships for success. United Nations agencies have undertaken an organizational change in recent years to embrace partnerships with civil society organizations. However, the United Nations can be more creative, outward-looking and, most importantly, more systematic, in collaborating with civil society organizations to prevent conflict and build sustainable peace.

Contributions of civil society organizations

4. Civil society organizations provide an array of capabilities and opportunities to supplement the role of Governments and the United Nations. The variety of the work of these organizations in prevention begins with being, in the words of the Secretary-General, "the conscience of humanity", and goes on to include working with Governments and the United Nations in specific ways on the ground. Reiterating the Secretary-General's remarks in the report on the prevention of armed conflict, both Mr. Egeland and Mr. Türk said that civil society organizations were indispensable in "track-II" and "people to people" diplomacy, which are often integral to successful official diplomacy and post-conflict political and reconciliation processes. At times, civil society organizations can reach parties on the ground that Governments cannot reach. Other ways in which civil society organizations can contribute to prevention that were noted by participants are the following:

(a) *Analysis*: Civil society organizations offer a unique ability to analyse local conflicts since they "live in communities and experience the dynamics of conflict first-hand". More specifically, they can call attention to disputes before they erupt into violent conflicts;

(b) *Partnership*: Civil society organizations have, in some cases, increased the capacity of government organizations and United Nations agencies by training personnel, providing early-warning capabilities and facilitating access to the local populace. Furthermore, they can increase the cost-efficiency of governmental and

United Nations programmes by evaluating projects and training the local populations to implement them;

(c) *Sustainability*: Noting that the engagement of local populations is essential to implementing peace agreements and preventing a recurrence of violence, civil society organizations offer capacity-building to local populations in post-conflict peace-building. They also increase the sustainability of United Nations peace operations by remaining in the area to continue capacity-building projects long after the United Nations mission is completed;

(d) *Networks*: By creating networks, civil society organizations can provide a streamlined interface for governments and the United Nations to civil society.

5. Despite the numerous capabilities civil society organizations offer, interacting and coordinating with civil society remains a challenge for Governments and the United Nations. It is evident that strategic linkages are needed between Governments, intergovernmental organizations and civil society. However, how to create linkages that complement each other's work rather than ones that impede or duplicate efforts is not well understood. The European Centre for Conflict Prevention, in conjunction with a network of civil society organizations around the world, has undertaken to explore these challenges.

The Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict

6. In response to the report of the Secretary-General on the prevention of armed conflict, a diverse and inclusive worldwide movement is under way. The Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict aims to engage civil society actors from the grass-roots to the international level towards the integration and mainstreaming of conflict prevention. Its objective is to improve international responses in preventing conflict, from the community to the global level. The goals are:

(a) To explore fully the role of civil society in conflict prevention and peace-building;

(b) To develop a coherent body of research and theory that will help the conflict prevention community play its full part in the international debate;

(c) To improve interaction between civil society groups, the United Nations, regional organizations and Governments;

(d) Strengthen regional and international networking between conflict prevention actors.

7. The preparatory phase of the project has established secretariats at the European Centre for Conflict Prevention, in Utrecht, Netherlands, in New York with the UN-NGO Conflict Prevention Working Group, and in each region for regional processes (see the section V for contact information).

8. The initiative now stands ready to move from its preparatory phase into the substantive exploration of issues at regional levels. Regional processes (timeline: 2003 and 2004) will begin at the grass-roots level and engage as many civil society actors as possible in discussions leading to regional conferences that will produce mutually agreed-upon regional plans of action. These regional plans of action, based on research, consultation and discussions that are rooted firmly in local cultural,

geographic and operational realities, will guide conflict prevention in the coming decades. The final phase of this process involves an international conference near United Nations Headquarters in New York in June 2005. Engaging professionals from all levels of conflict management and working from the regional plans of action, this international conference will be a launching point for future interaction of actors for prevention. It will formally recognize the partnerships created through the regional processes and will present to all participants the new, inclusive international agenda for conflict prevention.

9. Over the course of this process, expected outcomes are the following:

(a) Regional publications documenting lessons learned and best practices that increase the effectiveness of the coordination of the conflict prevention activities of civil society organizations, multilateral organizations and Governments;

(b) Regional and international plans of action to guide conflict prevention initiatives in the future;

(c) A global network of conflict prevention actors, including civil society, regional and multilateral organizations, and Governments;

(d) Commitments from Member States to realign existing conflict management mechanisms towards prevention;

(e) Support for Member States in their efforts to prevent conflict.

10. Integral to this process is the involvement of the United Nations and Member States at all levels. Therefore, it is recommended that the Missions in the New York area work with the UN-NGO Conflict Prevention Working Group by appointing a reference person at the Mission for the Working Group to contact. Similarly, it is recommended that United Nations agencies and programmes link with both the UN-NGO Conflict Prevention Working Group and encourage their field offices to liase with the coordinators of regional conferences.

11. Substantial funding and resource requirements are required for such a global process, specifically for the various regional processes. In the preparatory phase, numerous Governments came forth with funding. It is recommended that these Governments continue to support this process financially and that other Member States aid in this global initiative. Civil society organizations and foundations are encouraged to become involved in this process and support it as financially appropriate.

III. Discussion session

12. The 88 Member States present for the open meeting engaged in a constructive dialogue in support of the process of the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict. Indicative of the changing climate at the United Nations and global norms in the post-cold war era, no State expressed a view towards disregarding civil society or prevention as not integral or desirable in building peace in the current age. Rather, the Missions raised important questions and concerns towards the efficacy of civil society engagement in the promotion of a culture of prevention.

13. Aldo Mantovani, Deputy Permanent Representative of Italy to the United Nations, read out a statement on behalf of the European Union (including acceding

countries Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia, and associated country Turkey). He cited support for the Global Partnership's process by noting that:

> "preventive action is a cross-cutting issue and it must be approached in an integrated way, involving a wide range of actors and instruments in order to achieve its greatest effectiveness ... The European Union regards the protection and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms, which are strongly supported by the civil society actors, as a crucial component of societal development contributing to conflict prevention."

14. While acknowledging the importance of civil society involvement in supporting Governments and the United Nations in conflict prevention, Member States, both from the developed and developing countries, raised important questions that must be considered in this global process leading to the 2005 international conference. A paramount concern for some Member States was the conceptual clarification of what "civil society" means. Noting that some civil society organizations are destructive parties in some conflicts, questions of how to distinguish and deal with such organizations need to be addressed. Similarly, the proliferation of civil society organizations in recent years has caused unforeseen problems that must be addressed. The growing number of such organizations has caused competition for scarce resources (i.e. funding) among civil society organizations and between civil society organizations and Governments. Member States expressed a need for reassurance that by interacting with networks of civil society organizations they will not be overwhelmed by a deluge of activist pressure.

15. Member States expressed a desire to know more about the positive contributions of civil society organizations to peacemaking and prevention. Citing a general lack of collection and dissemination of peace research, Member States urged civil society organizations and the United Nations to produce compendiums of civil society organizations and the United Nations, their work, and lessons learned. Mr. Türk acknowledged that the United Nations must find innovative and creative ways of learning from civil society organizations.

16. The role of civil society in prevention was underscored by Member States calling for more attention to be paid to local voices. Local voices increase the chances of success by giving indications of their true needs, appropriate methods for intervention for the situation, and appropriate timing. The challenge is to find who the legitimate local voices are and where to strike the proper ratio between local ownership and international ownership of the problem. Linked to this concern is how the international community can empower local civil society organizations when their Governments are party to or a cause of the problem.

17. Some Member States queried on how to broaden and strengthen the role of civil society organizations. Noting the absence of civil society organizations involved in inter-State conflict, a Member State encouraged civil society organizations to find ways to affect and prevent international disputes as well. However, for civil society organizations to play an active role in prevention, especially of international disputes, their access to governing structures in the United Nations must be systemic instead of ad hoc.

18. International security affairs are the mandate of the Security Council. Although it remains largely a reactive body, prevention also falls under its mandate. Since

prevention requires early engagement of the international community, the role of civil society organizations in early warning is important. However, civil society organizations do not have regular access to the United Nations. Limited avenues of interaction afforded by the Arria Formula only allow civil society organizations to brief the Security Council during the conflict. Some Member States wondered whether there could be a more coherent and systemic approach to interaction of civil society organizations with the Security Council that would allow the Security Council to hear them well before the outbreak of violence.

19. Similar constraints for civil society organizations lie in their interaction with the United Nations system in the field. At times, whereas United Nations Headquarters may have opened its doors to interaction with a particular civil society organization, that organization often finds no cooperation from field offices. Interactions with civil society organizations in the field are often due to a country coordinator who personally knows the members of the organization or one who worked with civil society organizations before and has become comfortable in engaging with them. In short, personality-based interaction must be replaced with a more systematic interaction that allows the United Nations system to take advantage of civil society organizations in the field.

20. A Member State expressed grave concern that, although resolution 57/337 is a landmark document, prevention will not be regularly addressed since it does not have a place within one of the committees of the General Assembly. In fact, though the Security Council is mandated to address issues of peace and security, Article 14 also gives the General Assembly the responsibility to address security issues, especially in the prevention of conflict. Article 14 explicitly states that the involvement of the General Assembly in peace and security issues is subject to Article 12, thereby not allowing the Assembly to be seized of issues that are within the purview of the Security Council. However, since the Security Council often only has the ability to deal with disputes that have already descended into violence, the General Assembly can exercise its provision to address the prevention of disputes that are "likely to impair the general welfare or friendly relations among nations ..." (Article 14) before they erupt into violence. It is recommended that the General Assembly exercise its responsibility under the Charter to examine the prevention of violent conflicts between States and nations. One Member State wondered if prevention could be regularly discussed in the Fourth Committee. In addition, with all parts of the United Nations system (Member States, the Security Council and the Secretariat and agencies) affirming prevention as a paramount concern for the global community, it should be examined whether an aide-memoire for prevention is appropriate.

21. The breadth of questions and concerns expressed by Member States give the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict project many issues to consider. However, some of these questions can also be considered in the follow-up report on the implementation of resolution 57/337 as requested by the General Assembly for the fifty-ninth session. Mr. Türk welcomed consultation with the Global Partnership in the preparation of the report. He proposed a link between the Global Partnership and the Inter-agency Resource Group on Prevention, chaired by the Department of Political Affairs, which will be fully explored in the coming weeks.

IV. Conclusion

22. General Assembly resolution 57/337 offers hope for a new season in the conflict prevention debate. The Secretary-General has spoken, the Security Council has spoken, and now Member States at large have spoken. Civil society organizations have committed themselves to constructive engagement to strengthen prevention and aid the United Nations in mainstreaming prevention into the system. Participants at the open meeting showed clearly that they want to work together "to achieve the goals declared in the resolution on the prevention of armed conflict sooner and more effectively".

23. This very constructive open meeting has shown that, while many questions and concerns exist for Member States about engagement with civil society organizations, clear support exists for exploring and understanding the issues that will strengthen the partnerships between Governments, intergovernmental agencies and civil society in preventing deadly conflicts. Participating Member States welcomed the initiative of the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict to strengthen civil society engagement with the United Nations and Member States in efforts to prevent conflict.

Recommendations

- It is recommended that the General Assembly examine its role in the prevention of violent conflict as it relates to Article 14 of the Charter. It should also consider whether such issues should be regularly addressed in the Fourth Committee and if a prevention aide-memoire is appropriate.
- It is recommended that the United Nations and Member States support the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict initiative by becoming closely engaged as the process evolves and unfolds.
- It is recommended that the Missions at United Nations Headquarters work with the UN-NGO Conflict Prevention Working Group by appointing a liaison at the Mission for the Working Group to contact.
- It is recommended that United Nations offices, agencies, and programmes link with both the UN-NGO Conflict Prevention Working Group and encourage their field offices to liaise with the coordinators of regional conferences.
- It is recommended that the Department of Political Affairs further explore how to establish appropriate consultation mechanisms with the Global Partnership in the process of preparing the report to the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session.
- It is recommended that Governments continue to support this process financially and that other Member States and civil society organizations and foundations aid in this global initiative.

V. Contacts

European Centre for Conflict Prevention (ECCP)

Kortc Elisabethstraat 6
P.O. Box 14069
3508 SC Utrecht
The Netherlands

Tel: +31 30 242 7777
Fax: +31 30 236-9268
E-mail: info@conflict-prevention.net
Internet web site: www.conflict-prevention.net

Contact: Paul van Tongeren, p.vantongeren@conflict-prevention.net
(European Centre for Conflict Prevention can provide contacts for regional coordinators.)

UN-NGO Conflict Prevention Working Group

247 East 48th St.
New York, NY 10017
United States of America

Tel: +001 212 854 5623
Fax: + 001 212 854 6171
E-mail: mkh65@columbia.edu

The UN-NGO Conflict Prevention Working Group consists of:

Center for International Conflict Resolution, Columbia University

Community of Sant' Egidio

Initiatives of Change

Quaker United Nations Office — New York

Saferworld

World Vision International